This site uses cookies to provide you with a better experience. For information on our cookie policy, please visit this page. By continuing to use the site or closing this banner, you are agreeing to our terms of use.

READING LISTS

Gender Studies: Foundations and Key Concepts

Gender studies developed alongside and emerged out of Women's Studies. This non-exhaustive list introduces readers to scholarship in the field.

Jack Halberstam, Afsaneh Najmabadi-Evaz, and bell hooks via Wikimedia Commons

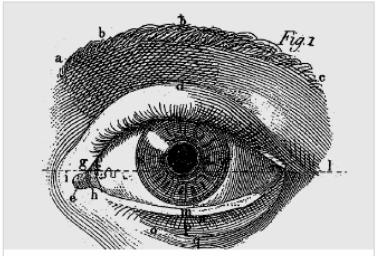
By: Mary Zaborskis | November 29, 2018 10 minutes

Share Tweet Email Print

Gender studies asks what it means to make gender salient, bringing a critical eye to everything from labor conditions to healthcare access to popular culture. Gender is never isolated from other factors that determine someone's position in the world, such as sexuality, race, class, ability, religion, region of origin, citizenship status, life experiences, and access to resources. Beyond studying gender as an identity category, the field is invested in illuminating the structures that naturalize, normalize, and discipline gender across historical and cultural contexts.

At a college or university, you'd be hard pressed to find a department that brands itself as simply Gender Studies. You'd be more likely to find different arrangements of the letters G, W, S, and perhaps Q and F, signifying gender, women, sexuality, queer, and feminist studies. These various letter configurations aren't just semantic idiosyncrasies. They illustrate the ways the field has grown and expanded since its institutionalization in the 1970s.

This non-exhaustive list aims to introduce readers to gender studies in a broad sense. It shows how the field has developed over the last several decades, as well as how its interdisciplinary nature offers



Reading Lists

Expert-curated collections of essential texts.

Read this next

a range of tools for understanding and critiquing our world.

Catharine R. Stimpson, Joan N. Burstyn, Domna C. Stanton, and Sandra M. Whisler, "Editorial." *Signs* (1975); "Editorial," *off our backs* (1970).

The editorial from the inaugural issue of *Signs*, founded in 1975 by Catharine Stimpson, explains that the founders hoped that the journal's title captured what women's studies is capable of doing: to "represent or point to something." Women's studies was conceptualized as an interdisciplinary field that could represent issues of gender and sexuality in new ways, with the possibility of shaping "scholarship, thought, and policy."

The editorial in the first issue of *off our backs*, a feminist periodical founded in 1970, explains how their collective wanted to explore the "dual nature of the women's movement:" that "women need to be free of men's domination" and "must strive to get off our backs." The content that follows includes reports on the Equal Rights Amendment, protests, birth control, and International Women's Day.

Robyn Wiegman, "Academic Feminism against Itself." *NWSA Journal* (2002).

Gender studies developed alongside and emerged out of Women's Studies, which consolidated as an academic field of inquiry in the 1970s. Wiegman tracks some of the anxieties that emerged with the shift from women's to gender studies, such as concerns it would decenter women and erase the feminist activism that gave rise to the field. She considers these anxieties as part of a larger concern over the future of the field, as well as fear that academic work on gender and sexuality has become too divorced from its activist roots.

Jack Halberstam, "Gender." *Keywords for American Cultural Studies, Second Edition* (2014).

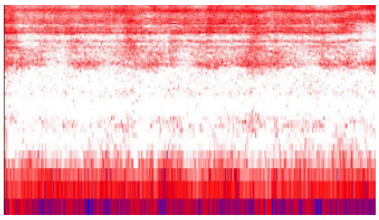
Halberstam's entry in this volume provides a useful overview for debates and concepts that have dominated the field of gender studies: Is gender purely a social construct? What is the relationship between sex and gender? How does the gendering of bodies shift across disciplinary and cultural contexts? How did the theorizing of gender performativity in the 1990s by **Judith Butler** open up intellectual trajectories for queer and transgender studies? What is the future of gender as an organizing rubric for social life and as a mode of intellectual inquiry? Halberstam's synthesis of the field makes a compelling case for why the study of gender persists and remains relevant for humanists, social scientists, and scientists alike.

Miqqi Alicia Gilbert, "Defeating Bigenderism: Changing Gender Assumptions in the Twenty-First Century." *Hypatia* (2009).

Scholar and transgender activist Miqqi Alicia Gilbert considers the production and maintenance of the gender binary—that is, the idea that there are only two genders and that gender is a natural fact that remains stable across the course of one's life. Gilbert's view extends across institutional, legal, and cultural contexts, imagining what a frameworks that gets one out of the gender binary and gender valuation would have to look like to eliminate sexism, transphobia, and discrimination.

Judith Lorber, "Shifting Paradigms and Challenging Categories." *Social Problems* (2006).

Judith Lorber identifies the key paradigm shifts in sociology around the question of gender: 1) acknowledging gender as an "organizing principle of the overall social order in modern societies;" 2) stipulating that gender is socially constructed, meaning that while gender is assigned at birth based



READING LISTS

Charlottesville Syllabus: Readings on the History of Hate in America

The history of racism and ethnic hate in America is long and deep. What are the cultural, economic, and political currents that led us here?

Trending Posts

Was the One-Child Policy Ever a Good Idea?

The Case for Race-Conscious Affirmative Action

The Extremely Real Science behind the Basilisk's Lethal Gaze

The Mysteries of Crown Shyness

Who Wrote the Declaration of Independence?

on visible genitalia, it isn't a natural, immutable category but one that is socially determined; 3) analyzing power in modern western societies reveals the dominance of men and promotion of a limited version of heterosexual masculinity; 4) emerging methods in sociology are helping disrupt the production of ostensibly universal knowledge from a narrow perspective of privileged subjects. Lorber concludes that feminist sociologists' work on gender has provided the tools for sociology to reconsider how it analyzes structures of power and produces knowledge.

bell hooks, "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women." *Feminist Review* (1986).

bell hooks argues that the feminist movement has privileged the voices, experiences, and concerns of white women at the expense of women of color. Instead of acknowledging who the movement has centered, white women have continually invoked the "common oppression" of all women, a move they think demonstrates solidarity but actually erases and marginalizes women who fall outside of the categories of white, straight, educated, and middle-class. Instead of appealing to "common oppression," meaningful solidarity requires that women acknowledge their differences, committing to a feminism that "aims to end sexist oppression." For hooks, this necessitates a feminism that is anti-racist. Solidarity doesn't have to mean sameness; collective action can emerge from difference.

Jennifer C. Nash, "re-thinking intersectionality." *Feminist Review* (2008).

Chances are you've come across the phrase "intersectional feminism." For many, this term is redundant: If feminism isn't attentive to issues impacting a range of women, then it's not actually feminism. While the term "intersectional" now circulates colloquially to signify a feminism that is inclusive, its usage has become divorced from its academic origins. The legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw created the term "intersectionality" in the 1980s based on Black women's experiences with the law in cases of discrimination and violence. Intersectionality is not an adjective or a way to describe identity, but a tool for analyzing structures of power. It aims to disrupt universal categories of and claims about identity. Jennifer Nash provides an overview of intersectionality's power, including guidance on how to deploy it in the service of coalition-building and collective action.

Treva B. Lindsey, "Post-Ferguson: A 'Herstorical' Approach to Black Violability." *Feminist Studies* (2015).

Treva Lindsey considers the erasure of **Black women's labor in anti-racist activism**, as well as the erasure of their experiences with violence and harm. From the Civil Rights Movement to #BlackLivesMatter, **Black women's contributions and leadership** have not been acknowledged to the same extent as their male counterparts. Furthermore, their experiences with state-sanctioned racial violence don't garner as much attention. Lindsey argues that we must make visible the experiences and labor of Black women and queer persons of color in activist settings in order to strengthen activist struggles for racial justice.

Renya Ramirez, "Race, Tribal Nation, and Gender: A Native Feminist Approach to Belonging." *Meridians* (2007).

Renya Ramirez (Winnebago) argues that indigenous activist struggles for sovereignty, liberation, and survival must account for gender. A range of issues impact Native American women, such as domestic abuse, **forced sterilization**, and sexual violence. Furthermore, the settler state has been invested in disciplining indigenous concepts and practices of gender, sexuality, and kinship, reorienting them to fit into white settler understandings of property and inheritance. A Native American feminist consciousness centers gender and envisions decolonization without sexism.

Hester Eisenstein, "A Dangerous Liaison? Feminism and Corporate Globalization." *Science & Society* (2005).

Hester Eisenstein argues that some of contemporary U.S. feminism's work in a global context has been informed by and strengthened capitalism in a way that ultimately increases harms against marginalized women. For example, some have suggested offering poor rural women in non-U.S. contexts microcredit as a path to economic liberation. In reality, these debt transactions hinder economic development and "continue the policies that have created the poverty in the first place." Eisenstein acknowledges that feminism has the power to challenge capitalist interests in a global context, but she cautions us to consider how aspects of the feminist movement have been coopted by corporations.

Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Transing and Transpassing Across Sex-Gender Walls in Iran." *Women's Studies Quarterly* (2008).

Afsaneh Najmabadi remarks on the existence of sex-reassignment surgeries in Iran since the 1970s and the increase in these surgeries in the twenty-first century. She explains that these surgeries are a response to perceived sexual deviance; they're offered to cure persons who express same-sex desire. Sex-reassignment surgeries ostensibly "heteronormaliz[e]" people who are pressured to pursue this medical intervention for legal and religious reasons. While a repressive practice, Najmabadi also argues that this practice has paradoxically provided "*relatively* safer semipublic gay and lesbian social space" in Iran. Najmabadi's scholarship illustrates how gender and sexual categories, practices, and understandings are influenced by geographical and cultural contexts.

Susan Stryker, Paisley Currah, and Lisa Jean Moore's "Introduction: Trans-, Trans, or Transgender?" *Women's Studies Quarterly* (2008).

Susan Stryker, Paisley Currah, and Lisa Jean Moore map the ways that transgender studies can expand feminist and gender studies. "Transgender" does not need to exclusively signify individuals and communities, but can provide a lens for interrogating all bodies' relationships to gendered spaces, disrupting the bounds of seemingly strict identity categories, and redefining gender. The "trans-" in transgender is a conceptual tool for interrogating the relationship between bodies and the institutions that discipline them.

David A. Rubin, "'An Unnamed Blank That Craved a Name': A Genealogy of Intersex as Gender." *Signs* (2012).

David Rubin considers the fact that intersex persons have been subject to medicalization, pathologization, and "regulation of embodied difference through biopolitical discourses, practices, and technologies" that rely on normative cultural understandings of gender and sexuality. Rubin considers the impact intersexuality had on conceptualizations of gender in mid-twentieth century sexology studies, and how the very concept of gender that emerged in that moment has been used to regulate the lives of intersex individuals.

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Feminist Disability Studies." *Signs* (2005).

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson provides a thorough overview of the field of feminist disability studies. Both feminist and disability studies contend that those things which seem most natural to bodies are actually produced by a range of political, legal, medical, and social institutions. Gendered and disabled bodies are marked by these institutions. Feminist disability studies asks: How are meaning and value assigned to disabled bodies? How is this meaning and value determined by other social

markers, such as gender, sexuality, race, class, religion, national origin, and citizenship status?

The field asks under what conditions disabled bodies are denied or granted sexual, reproductive, and bodily autonomy and how disability impacts the exploration of gender and sexual expression in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood historical and contemporary pathologization of genders and sexualities. It explores how disabled activists, artists, and writers respond to social, cultural, medical, and political forces that deny them access, equity, and representation

Karin A. Martin, "William Wants a Doll. Can He Have One? Feminists, Child Care Advisors, and Gender-Neutral Child Rearing." *Gender and Society* (2005).

Karin Martin examines the gender socialization of children through an analysis of a range of parenting materials. Materials that claim to be (or have been claimed as) gender-neutral actually have a deep investment in training children in gender and sexual norms. Martin invites us to think about how adult reactions to children's gender nonconformity pivots on a fear that gender expression in childhood is indicative of present or future non-normative sexuality. In other words, U.S. culture is unable to separate gender from sexuality. We imagine gender identity and expression maps predictably onto sexual desire. When children's gender identity and expression exceeds culturally-determined permissible bounds in a family or community, adults project onto the child and discipline accordingly.

Sarah Pemberton, "Enforcing Gender: The Constitution of Sex and Gender in Prison Regimes." *Signs* (2013).

Sarah Pemberton's considers how **sex-segregated prisons** in the U.S. and England discipline their populations differently according to gender and sexual norms. This contributes to the policing, punishment, and vulnerability of incarcerated gender-nonconforming, transgender, and intersex persons. Issues ranging from healthcare access to increased rates of violence and harassment suggest that policies impacting incarcerated persons should center gender.

Dean Spade, "Some Very Basic Tips for Making High Education More Accessible to Trans Students and Rethinking How We Talk about Gendered Bodies." *The Radical Teacher* (2011).

Lawyer and trans activist Dean Spade offers a pedagogical perspective on how to make classrooms accessible and inclusive for students. Spade also offers guidance on how to have classroom conversations about gender and bodies that don't reassert a biological understanding of gender or equate certain body parts and functions with particular genders. While the discourse around these issues is constantly shifting, Spade provides useful ways to think about small changes in language that can have a powerful impact on students.

Sarah S. Richardson, "Feminist Philosophy of Science: History, Contributions, and Challenges." *Synthese* (2010).

Feminist philosophy of science is a field comprised of scholars studying gender and science that has its origins in the work of feminist scientists in the 1960s. Richardson considers the contributions made by these scholars, such as increased opportunities for and representation of **women in STEM fields**, pointing out biases in seemingly neutral fields of scientific inquiry. Richardson also considers the role of gender in knowledge production, looking at the difficulties women have faced in institutional and professional contexts. The field of feminist philosophy of science and its practitioners are marginalized and delegitimized because of the ways they challenge dominant modes of knowledge production and disciplinary inquiry.

Bryce Traister's "Academic Viagra: The Rise of American Masculinity Studies." *American Quarterly* (2000).

Bryce Traister considers the emergence of masculinity studies out of gender studies and its development in American cultural studies. He argues that the field has remained largely invested in centering heterosexuality, asserting the centrality and dominance of men in critical thought. He offers ways for thinking about how to study masculinity without reinstituting gendered hierarchies or erasing the contributions of feminist and queer scholarship.

Share Tweet Email Print

Have a correction or comment about this article?
Please contact us.

feminism gender American Quarterly Feminist Review Feminist Studies Gender and Society Hypatia Keywords for American Cultural Studies, Second Edition Meridians NWSA Journal Off Our Backs Science & Society Signs Social Problems Synthese The Radical Teacher Women's Studies Quarterly

JSTOR

Resources

JSTOR is a digital library for scholars, researchers, and students. JSTOR Daily readers can access the original research behind our articles for free on JSTOR.

Editorial
By: Catharine R. Stimpson, Joan N. Burstyn, Domna C. Stanton and Sandra M. Whisler
Signs, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Autumn, 1975), pp. v-viii
The University of Chicago Press

Editorial
By: Barbara Burris
Off Our Backs, Vol. 1, No. 1 (FEBRUARY 27, 1970), p. 2
off our backs, inc.

Academic Feminism against Itself
By: Robyn Wiegman
NWSA Journal, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Summer, 2002), pp. 18-37
The Johns Hopkins University Press

Gender
By: Jack Halberstam
Keywords for American Cultural Studies, Second Edition, pp. 116-118
NYU Press

Defeating Bigenderism: Changing Gender Assumptions in the Twenty-First Century
By: Miqqi Alicia Gilbert
Hypatia, Vol. 24, No. 3, Transgender Studies and Feminism: Theory, Politics, and Gendered Realities (Summer, 2009), pp. 93-112
Wiley on behalf of Hypatia, Inc.

re-thinking intersectionality
By: Jennifer C. Nash
Feminist Review, No. 89 (2008), pp. 1-15
Palgrave Macmillan Journals

Shifting Paradigms and Challenging Categories
By: Judith Lorber
Social Problems, Vol. 53, No. 4 (November 2006), pp. 448-453
Oxford University Press on behalf of the Society for the Study of Social Problems

Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women
By: bell hooks
Feminist Review, No. 23, Socialist-Feminism: Out of the Blue (Summer, 1986), pp. 125-138
Palgrave Macmillan Journals

Post-Ferguson: A "Herstorical" Approach to Black Violability
By: Treva B. Lindsey
Feminist Studies, Vol. 41, No. 1 (2015), pp. 232-237
Feminist Studies, Inc.

Race, Tribal Nation, and Gender: A Native Feminist Approach to Belonging
By: Renya Ramirez
Meridians, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2007), pp. 22-40
Duke University Press

A Dangerous Liaison? Feminism and Corporate Globalization
By: Hester Eisenstein
Science & Society, Vol. 69, No. 3, The Deep Structure of the Present Moment (Jul., 2005), pp. 487-518
Guilford Press

Transing and Transpassing across Sex-Gender Walls in Iran
By: Afsaneh Najmabadi
Women's Studies Quarterly, Vol. 36, No. 3/4, Trans- (Fall - Winter, 2008), pp. 23-42
The Feminist Press at the City University of New York

Introduction: Trans-, Trans, or Transgender?
By: Susan Stryker, Paisley Currah and Lisa Jean Moore
Women's Studies Quarterly, Vol. 36, No. 3/4, Trans- (Fall - Winter, 2008), pp. 11-22
The Feminist Press at the City University of New York

"An Unnamed Blank That Craved a Name": A Genealogy of Intersex as Gender
By: David A. Rubin
Signs, Vol. 37, No. 4, Sex: A Thematic Issue (Summer 2012), pp. 883-908
The University of Chicago Press

Feminist Disability Studies
By: Rosemarie Garland-Thomson
Signs, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Winter 2005), pp. 1557-1587
The University of Chicago Press

William Wants a Doll. Can He Have One? Feminists, Child Care Advisors, and Gender-Neutral Child Rearing
By: Karin A. Martin
Gender and Society, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Aug., 2005), pp. 456-479
Sage Publications, Inc.

Enforcing Gender: The Constitution of Sex and Gender in Prison Regimes
By: Sarah Pemberton
Signs, Vol. 39, No. 1, Women, Gender, and Prison: National and Global Perspectives (Autumn 2013), pp. 151-175
The University of Chicago Press

Some Very Basic Tips for Making Higher Education More Accessible to Trans Students and Rethinking How We Talk about Gendered Bodies
By: Dean Spade
The Radical Teacher, No. 92 (Winter 2011), pp. 57-62
University of Illinois Press

Feminist philosophy of science: history, contributions, and challenges
By: Sarah S. Richardson
Synthese, Vol. 177, No. 3, MAKING PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE MORE SOCIALLY RELEVANT (December 2010), pp. 337-362
Springer

Academic Viagra: The Rise of American Masculinity Studies
By: Bryce Traister
American Quarterly, Vol. 52, No. 2 (Jun., 2000), pp. 274-304
The Johns Hopkins University Press

Join Our Newsletter

Get your fix of JSTOR Daily's best stories in your inbox each Thursday.

Your Email

Subscribe

Privacy Policy Contact Us

You may unsubscribe at any time by clicking on the provided link on any marketing message.

More Stories

SOCIAL HISTORY

Richard Wright Helped Bring Mental Healthcare to Harlem

The famous novelist worked to fight the psychological cost of black oppression.

SOCIAL HISTORY

The Bluestockings

Meet the original Bluestockings, a group of women intellectuals. Their name would eventually become a misogynist epithet -- but it didn't start that way.

EDUCATION

The Case for Race-Conscious Affirmative Action

Minority students in racially isolated schools have drastically less access to critical educational resources.

SOCIAL HISTORY

Defying the Gender Binary in the 1930s

In the 1930s, experimental psychologist Agnes Landis interviewed women who identified as "tomboys."

Recent Posts

- When Language Started a Political Revolution
- A Critical Theory of Binge Watching
- The Guerrilla Girls Are Back for Hollywood
- Why Is It So Much Hotter in the City?
- Salamanders Crossing: This Way to the Vernal Pool!

JSTOR Daily provides context for current events using scholarship found in JSTOR, a digital library of academic journals, books, and other material. We publish articles grounded in peer-reviewed research and provide free access to that research for all of our readers.

JSTOR

JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization helping the academic community use digital technologies to preserve the scholarly record and to advance research and teaching in sustainable ways.

©2019 ITHAKA. All Rights Reserved. JSTOR®, the JSTOR logo, and ITHAKA® are registered trademarks of ITHAKA.